

CALIFORNIA RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT



DIRECTOR'S HANDBOOK

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Conservation, Division of Land Resource
Protection, RCD Assistance Program

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INTRODUCTION & HISTORY



“The success or failure of a soil conservation district rests largely on upon the shoulders of the board of directors.”*

*Handbook for the Organization and Operation of Soil Conservation Districts in the State of California. October 1953

Introduction

Resource Conservation District (RCD) directors play a critical role in the protection and improvement of local natural resources. As representatives of their community, directors have the responsibility to assess local conservation needs and develop programs to meet those needs. This handbook is designed as a reference tool for directors to use as they fulfill their important duties. The handbook provides an overview of directors' powers, authorities, roles and responsibilities. The book was designed to be useful for both new and experienced directors. For more information about any of the topics covered in this handbook, directors can consult the RCD guidebook. A copy of the guidebook is included in this binder on compact disc. To read the files on the compact disc, you will need to download Adobe Acrobat reader. The reader can be downloaded for free from the Adobe website at:
<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>

This handbook contains several references to government codes. Please remember that these codes are subject to change. Directors should review these codes frequently in order to remain up-to-date. Codes can be accessed on the Internet by visiting the legislative information website at <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov>. Once you reach the site, click on the blue and yellow box at the bottom of the page that says California Law. This will take you to a page that lists all the main codes. Most references to Resource Conservation Districts can be found in the Public Resources Code. However, there are other codes, such as the Government

Code, that can also apply to RCDs. Click on the box next to the code you are interested in, then enter any keywords you are searching for in the space provided. For example, if you were looking for the portion of the Public Resources Code that applies to RCDs you would simply click the box next to Public Resources Code and type Resource Conservation Districts in the box provided. This will give you a list of all the sections of the code that contain the words “resource conservation district.”

History

In response to the national “Dust Bowl” crisis of the 1930’s, the federal government passed legislation in 1937 establishing the Soil Conservation Service (SCS). Shortly after the formation of the SCS, conservationists realized that a federal agency in Washington might not be sufficiently responsive to local needs so Soil Conservation Districts were set up under state law to be controlled by local boards of directors. In 1938, California generated legislation authorizing the formation of Soil Conservation Districts under Division 9 of the Public Resources Code. These districts assisted landowners with erosion and flood control problems (primarily on agricultural lands), functions originally envisioned by the formation of the SCS.

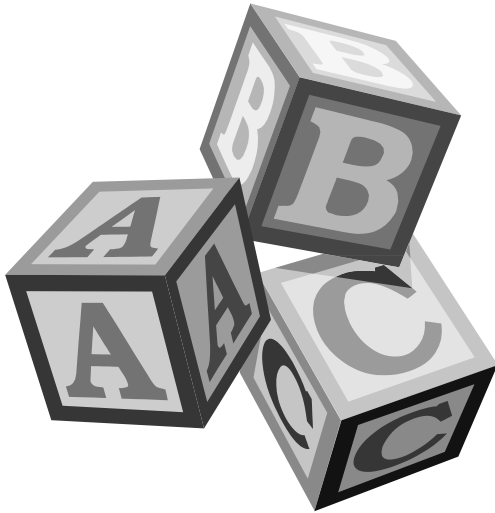
Under Division 9, Soil Conservation Districts were empowered to manage soil and water resources for conservation, but these powers were expanded in 1971 to include related resources including fish and wildlife habitat. This expansion of power was reflected in the change of name from “Soil”

Conservation District to “Resource” Conservation District.

Districts receiving property tax revenues prior to the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978, generally continue to receive county-collected property taxes; however, most districts receive very little regular funding through local taxation and rely heavily on competitive grants and other types of fundraising to stay in operation.

Today, there are 103 districts that manage diverse resource conservation projects over more than 85 percent of the state.

DIRECTOR BASICS



RCD boards consist of five, seven or nine directors as specified in section 9301(a) of Division 9. The number of directors can be changed through a resolution adopted by the majority of the board of directors. However, the change must be published at least once in a newspaper of general circulation within each county the district serves.

Section 9314 of Division 9 states that RCD directors serve four-year terms. Directors can either be elected in a general election or appointed by the county board of supervisors. In cases where the district is in more than one county, the board of supervisors that represent the largest portion of the RCD appoints the directors after conferring with the other counties. Both new and multiple term directors must qualify for office and take an oath of office upon election or appointment.

Qualifications

To qualify to serve as an RCD director, candidates must:

1. Be a registered voter in California.
2. **There are 2 ways to meet the next requirement.**
 - a. The first option is: A director must reside within the district **AND (in addition to being a resident) either own land in the district OR served as an associate director for two years.**
 - b. Note: Serving as an associate director is not a substitute for being a district resident; it is a substitute for owning land within the district.

- c. The second option allows a non-resident to be a director IF they are a designated agent for a landowner who resides within the district.

To qualify under the second option, a resident landowner must submit a statement assigning the director candidate as his/her agent for the purposes of serving on the RCD board.

Suisun RCD and Grasslands RCD are exempt from the district residency requirement.

Even if all of the above qualifications are met, **an individual cannot be a county supervisor and an RCD director at the same time.**

Conflict of Interest

As elected or appointed officials of a public agency, RCD directors must avoid conflicts of interest. Directors have a responsibility to disclose actual or potential conflicts before their appointment. The degree to which directors must disclose assets or business interests in a conflict of interest statement varies based on the districts conflict of interest code. However, directors must fill out a Conflict of Interest Form 700 annually as well as upon assuming office. You can find more information on conflict of interest requirements on the Fair Political Practices Commission website at:
<http://www.fppc.ca.gov>.

Section 9304 of Division 9 states: “No director or other officer of the district shall be interested directly or indirectly in the sale of equipment, materials or services to the district.” Directors are prohibited from receiving any compensation for their work as a director. For example, being a director and an employee of the district at the same time is prohibited. To avoid potential conflicts of interest, it’s important to remember that directors cannot receive *any* financial benefits from the district. For example, a director who owns an equipment yard could not rent that equipment to the district.

Division 9 does allow directors to be reimbursed for travel expenses to and from meetings. The board should establish reimbursement amounts in a district travel policy.

Vacancies

To ensure that districts retain experienced directors at all times, RCD directors are divided into two approximately equal classes. Since boards consist of an odd number of directors (five, seven, or nine), one class will have fewer directors. Every other year one of the classes of directors will be up for reelection or appointment. The four-year terms terminate at noon on the last Friday in November of the second even-numbered year after taking office. When a term expires it creates a scheduled vacancy that can be filled by either election or appointment. However, directors hold their office until his or her successor has met all qualifications. According to section 9314 of Division 9, “The expiration of the term of any director does not constitute a vacancy

and the director shall hold office until his or her successor has qualified.”

Elections:

When RCDs choose to fill vacancies by election they must follow the Uniform District Election Law, sections 10500-10556 of the Election Code. Elections are held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Every other year one class of directors will be up for reelection. All registered voters from the district at large are eligible to vote for directors. Remember, a retiring director does not leave his position until his or her successor has qualified for office unless the director has submitted an official resignation letter, with a copy sent to the Board of Supervisors. Division 9 requires applications for election to be signed by at least 10 voters within the district.

Appointment:

The Legislature makes it clear that it would prefer directors to be selected through the election process. However, in 1985, Division 9 was amended to allow directors to be appointed by their county board of supervisors. To exercise this option, the RCD must submit a request to the board of supervisors of the principle county no later than 125 days prior to Election Day in any election year. The board of supervisors then reviews candidates and selects directors after consulting with any other counties within the district. Section 54974 of the Government Code requires districts to post notice of a vacancy within 20 days after a vacancy occurs and allow at least 10 working days to receive applications. Candidates should file their

applications with the appropriate county officials. Check with the county to determine who should receive the application. The board of supervisors has the responsibility to solicit recommendations for new directors from a variety of organizations and interests within the district. Furthermore, it is the intent of the Legislature, that the supervisors only appoint applicants that have demonstrated an interest in soil and water conservation. (Section 9314, Division 9)

Unscheduled Vacancies:

Unscheduled vacancies are created when any of the following events occur:

- A director dies
- A director resigns. If a director wishes to resign he/she must notify the board of supervisors of the principal county in writing.
- A director is disqualified. (See Disqualification below)
- A competent tribunal declares his/her election or appointment void.

The procedure for filling an unscheduled vacancy depends on whether the exiting director was appointed or elected. If the director was originally elected to the board, the remaining RCD directors can either (1) fill the vacancy themselves by making an appointment until the next election or (2) hold an election at the next election date. If the directors make an appointment, **they must first post a vacancy notice and allow 15 days for responses.** It's a good idea to post the notice in a generally circulated newspaper within the district. If the board

of supervisors appointed the director that is leaving, the supervisors have a responsibility to appoint a new director to fill the vacancy. The new director will serve until the end of the unexpired term. **It is the responsibility of the RCD to notify the board of supervisors of an unscheduled vacancy.** Often, RCDs will suggest a replacement to the supervisors based on the qualifications as outlined above.

Disqualification

According to Section 1770 of the Government Code directors can be disqualified for the following reasons:

- A court declares the director physically or mentally incapacitated due to disease, illness, or accident and there is reasonable cause to believe that the director can not perform his or her duties for the remainder of the term.
- The director ceases to be a resident of the state or district. The director need not be a resident landowner within the district if he or she is a designated agent of such a landowner. Suisun and Grasslands RCD directors are exempt from the residency requirement.
- The director ceases to perform his or her duties for a period of three consecutive months and the absence is not due to illness.
- The director is convicted of a felony or violation of his or her official duties.
- The director refuses or neglects to file his or her oath of office within 20 days after receiving the certificate of election or appointment.

- A court declares the directors' election or appointment void.
- A director is committed to a hospital or sanitarium as a drug addict, inebriate or stimulant addict.

Associate Directors

Associate director positions were established to give those who did not meet the qualifications of a director a chance to take an active role in the district. Under Division 9, associate directors can qualify for a position on the board after they have severed as an associate for two or more years, even if they do not own property within the district.

Associate directors do not have the right to vote on board matters. However, they can attend meetings and provide the district with extra expertise. Frequently associate directors also contribute by serving districts on various district committees.

Notes:

POWERS AND AUTHORITIES



The overall function of an RCD board of directors is to provide resource conservation leadership to people and communities within the district. The primary role of an RCD board is that of a decision-making body to set policy, envision a resource management program to meet the needs of the community, create and implement plans, and educate the public about resource conservation issues.

Division 9 of the California Public Resources Code gives RCDs several powers and authorities. It is important for directors to be familiar with Division 9 as they conduct district business. This section of the handbook outlines and explains the powers given to RCDs.

Management

In section 9401 of Division 9, RCD directors are empowered to manage district operations, projects, improvements and any property owned by the district. Day-to-day district management can involve the management of daily operations as well as district projects.

District Operations

Directors have a responsibility to oversee the management of day-to-day district operations. Directors must ensure that the RCD follows state and federal laws such as the Equal Opportunity Employment Practices Act. Furthermore, directors have the critical task of envisioning a district program to meet local conservation needs. In order to accomplish both important duties, the district should develop policies and procedures to manage

daily operations more efficiently. Having procedures and policies in place that all directors understand, can help the directors focus more effort on developing RCD goals and less effort on the every day details of operations. Division 9 does not require districts to develop policies, but policies can be an extremely useful tool for managing district operations.

Procedures can range from simple to complex. For instance, assigning one director to handle district media relations is considered a procedure. Procedures are simply the way the district routinely handles district business. Some policies, such as a personnel policy, are vital for a successful operation that complies with local, state, and federal laws. RCDs may also consider adopting policies for vehicle use, public records requests, fiscal operations, purchasing, travel, record keeping, document retention, travel, fees for services, safety, or any other district concerns.

Projects

RCDs get involved in a wide variety of resource conservation projects. Projects can take place on both public and private lands. Some examples of projects a district might be involved in include: conservation education, erosion control, installing best management practices, demonstration projects, fuels reduction, road management or maintenance, developing watershed plans, and more. Project management will vary depending on the nature of the project; however, there are some basic management steps that will apply to all projects. The first step in project management is to identify a need and create a plan to address that need. The

next step is to secure funding and identify partnerships that need to be developed. The district then executes the plan once funding and partnerships are in place. The final step in project management is to monitor and report on success.

Lands, Easements, and Property

Division 9 also gives districts the right to own and manage land, easements, and property. There are many reasons a district may want to own property. For instance, if there is a piece of land within the district in need of extensive conservation treatments, it may benefit the district to buy the land to administer the treatments. Districts can also purchase easements for conservation purposes. One source of funding for such easements is the Department of Conservation's California Farmland Conservancy Program. Division 9 allows districts to purchase office space as well. Furthermore, RCDs can also purchase equipment or tools to help them complete their conservation work. They may also purchase land and a building to house the district.

Cooperating and Coordinating

Districts can cooperate with other entities to plan, receive funding, and deliver services. Many districts are involved in cooperative efforts to develop watershed and other resource management plans. Such efforts are commonly referred to as Coordinated Resource Management and Planning (CRMP). Frequently districts work with other entities to receive funding through grant programs. It is also common for districts to work with agencies such as NRCS, UC Extension, Bureau of Land Management, water agencies, Environmental

Protection Agency, and others to provide landowners with technical assistance through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). Division 9 also gives districts the right to develop partnerships with other districts to discuss and address common issues or problems. Many districts are members of the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD). There are ten CARCD regions throughout California, designed keeping basic bio-regions in mind. Regional meetings generally take place twice a year to discuss issues of importance to the area. Districts are also encouraged to develop partnerships with local, state, federal, and tribal governments. For example, the Western Shasta RCD developed a strong partnership with the US Bureau of Land Management, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and a homeowners association to assist them in implementing a strategic fuels reduction plan that will reduce fire risk within portions of the district. Districts also form alliances with other organizations including for profit and non-profits, as well as individuals, to help them achieve their goals. The Surprise Valley RCD has enlisted a local Boy Scout troop to help them map noxious weeds. This partnership is mutually beneficial. The RCD is able to find volunteer labor and the Boy Scouts are given the opportunity to learn how to use mapping equipment and develop maps. This partnership will result in a noxious weed map and the Boy Scouts will be given a valuable learning opportunity.

Another advantage to these partnerships is that RCDs can coordinate with partners to more effectively reach government decision makers. Working together to present a unified front results

in a much stronger legislative outreach program.
(see *legislative education below*)

Education and Outreach

Sections 9402, 9411, and 9402 of Division 9 specifically give RCDs the power and the responsibility to educate their communities about resource conservation issues. Districts can provide both adult and youth conservation education. Directors are also encouraged to keep their local, state, and federal legislative representatives informed about district activities.

Adult Education

RCDs should be creative about providing education and outreach to adults. In order to reach different people and interest groups it is important to develop a wide variety of education and outreach methods. The following are some suggestions for education and outreach methods.

Section 9402 of Division 9 empowers districts to conduct surveys, investigations and research related to resource conservation. Once this work is completed the RCD should disseminate their findings to other agencies doing similar work and to the public in order to reduce duplication of efforts. In plain language, this means that when RCDs conduct surveys or research within their district they should share their results. Other agencies or organizations will then be able to use information collected by the RCD to further their own goals.

In the past, RCDs have used a wide variety of adult education and outreach strategies. Awards, media

outreach, public appearances, demonstration projects, and direct instruction are five common education and outreach methods.

Awards: Some RCDs have a “cooperator of the year” award to recognize contributions local landowners have made to resource conservation efforts. Other districts offer scholarships to graduating high school students. Such awards are an excellent way to encourage good stewardship and publicize the RCD.

Media Outreach: Media outreach can be an effective way for RCDs to reach their constituents. Many RCDs send out monthly or quarterly newsletters or conduct other direct mailings. To view sample newsletters see Appendix U of the RCD Guidebook. Another common form of media outreach is the Internet. More and more RCDs are developing websites to publicize district activities and reach out to constituents they might not otherwise be able to reach. The National Association of Conservation Districts offers districts across the country discounted Internet and email services in some areas. Districts can also advertise special programs or upcoming events in newspapers or on the radio.

Newsletters/Direct Mailings: Some districts chose to publicize their activities and educate the public through monthly or quarterly newsletters. Newsletters can contain information about upcoming events, district activities, and educational articles. Some districts sell advertising space in their newsletters to help pay for publication costs.

Direct mailings can also be an effective outreach tool. For example, if a district conducts or plans a demonstration project that reduces runoff from a dairy, they may want to distribute invitations to workshops and provide information on techniques to all area dairy farms.

Public Appearances: RCDs should take advantage of all opportunities to publicize their work and educate the public. County fairs or other community events are an ideal location for RCDs to garner public support for their activities. Public speaking can also be an effective way to engage the public. For example, speaking at meetings held by other organizations, such as the Farm Bureau or Homeowners Association, can result in new partnerships and improved public awareness of conservation issues.

Demonstration Projects: Section 9411 of Division 9 states that directors have the authority to carry out demonstration projects on public land, with the consent of the agency administering the land, or on private lands, with the consent of the landowner. Demonstration projects not only educate but also showcase the value of new and proven conservation techniques.

Direct Instruction: Workshops and field trips are another useful education and outreach tool. They provide landowners with an opportunity to learn from experts about improving environmental health and about advances in conservation technology. Workshops and public

meetings can also give landowners a chance to voice their opinions on RCD activities.

Educating Young Adults and Children

Section 9419 of Division 9 states that each district may develop and disseminate conservation education programs for use in kindergarten through 12th grade. Districts are also encouraged to use existing conservation education programs. There are many ways an RCD can provide educational opportunities for children. The following are a few ideas about how to provide youth conservation education.

Contests: RCDs can develop their own conservation related contests or they can participate in existing contests. Each year CARCD sponsors a “speak-off” contest for California’s high school students. A unique topic is chosen annually for the contest. Students participate in a series of events, held first at an RCD meeting, then at a CARCD regional meeting, and finally at the CARCD annual state meeting. To find out more about this event, talk to your CARCD regional chair or the Chair of the CARCD Education Committee.

Extracurricular Activities: Activities outside of the regular school day can also be an effective way to educate school children. Some examples include, clean up days, field trips, competitions, or similar events. The Envirothon program is an annual program that many RCDs take part in. Students from high schools throughout California learn about,

discuss and develop plans about different aspects of environmental science. At the end of the year they compete in a statewide competition to test the knowledge they have gained. The winning team goes on to compete in a nationwide competition. Other districts participate in Range Camp, a once yearly camp that covers various environmental topics over a week-long residential stay.

Classroom Education: On-site programs are another option for youth education. RCDs can develop curriculum to be used in the classroom or they can promote existing programs. Adopt-a-Watershed and Food, Land and People are examples of existing programs. Adopt-A-Watershed involves curriculum developed for kindergarten through 12th grade. The curriculum provides students with an in-depth education on the science behind watersheds. Students learn about watersheds, how to monitor water quality, how to improve watershed health and more.

Legislators

It is important for directors to maintain a relationship with their local, state and national legislators, and neighboring Native American tribal governments if applicable. RCDs should send legislators and leaders newsletters, annual reports, annual plans and other materials that highlight the district's work. Each year CARCD hosts a "Day in the Capitol" in Sacramento. This event gives RCDs the opportunity to meet with their state legislators to provide information on RCD activities and needs relative to their own constituents. Day in the Capitol

is also an opportunity for RCDs to offer assistance to legislators with any projects and needs the legislators would like to see addressed.

Accepting Funding

Division 9 gives RCDs the right to accept funds to use for resource conservation work within their district. RCDs can accept grants and gifts from federal, state, and private sources. Section 9403.5 of Division 9 also gives RCDs the right to establish fees for the services they deliver. Before charging for their services, RCDs should consult legal council and secure appropriate insurance. RCDs can also accept contributions from individuals, organizations, or other entities.

Employees and Contractors

Section 9404 of Division 9 allows RCDs to hire employees, contractors or agents as needed. Employees can help the district reach their goals and objectives. RCDs can also hire contractors for short term specialized work. For more information about employees and contractors see the personnel and volunteers section on page 37.

Legal Powers

RCDs are given the right to sue and can also be sued. Division 9 also states that RCDs have the right to consult their county district attorney or county counsel. Districts can also hire private legal services and consultants.

Annual and Long-Range Planning

Directors have a responsibility to assess the conservation needs of their district and devise plans to meet those needs. Plans should be based on input from communities the district serves.

As of January 2000, Division 9 requires RCDs to develop both annual and long-range plans in order to be eligible for grant funding through the Department of Conservation. Annual plans should be adopted by March 1st of each year. This handbook provides detailed information about the planning process in the planning section starting on page 61.

Continuing Director Development

Directors have a responsibility to expand their knowledge of local conservation issues, district operations, and other topics related to their district. Several organizations and agencies can help directors accomplish this task.

The Department of Conservation's RCD Assistance Program has staff available to provide RCDs with training pertaining to board operations, the rules and regulations RCDs must follow, grant writing and fundraising, strategic planning and policy development, and community outreach and education. The Assistance Program provides training in other areas on request. The program also has a staff member to help RCDs obtain the necessary permits for conservation projects.

CARCD also provides directors with training and help with RCD issues. Periodically, they send out

newsletters containing various RCD related information. CARCD also has an email listserve to allow districts to discuss issues and share information. To subscribe send an email to staff@carcd.org requesting to be added to the carcd listserve.

Notes:

ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION



Like any agency or business, RCDs must deal with organizational and administrative issues. This section of the handbook contains information and advice to assist RCDs in dealing with these matters.

Common Board Structures

Section 9023 of Division 9 specifies that the powers of the district “shall be exercised and the duties performed by the directors acting as a body and not as individuals.” Decisions should be made using a majority vote. No one director should have any more power than another. However, many districts find it helpful to assign specific duties to individual directors. Often the board will have a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, other directors and associate directors.

According to section 9306 of Division 9, the board should elect a president from among the directors to serve the board. The president is responsible for developing meeting agendas, facilitating meetings, suggesting or asking for motions, appointing committee meetings, assigning committee responsibilities, training new board members, and other duties as determined by the board.

The vice president serves as a back up to the president. He or she will take on the responsibilities of the president when the president is not available. The president may also ask the vice president or any other director to assume some of the duties typically assigned to the president.

The secretary oversees the distribution of meeting agendas under the direction of the president. Furthermore, the secretary keeps track of suggested

agenda items for future agendas. The secretary also has the responsibility to keep minutes, record committee activities, and initiate correspondence on behalf of the board. The secretary can either be a non-paid director or a paid staff member.

The board treasurer also plays an important role in district operations. The treasurer is responsible for the following: keeping complete and accurate records of district expenditures, issuing receipts for money received by the district, paying district bills when approved by the board, making monthly financial reports, completing annual financial reports, depositing checks into the district account, as well as assisting with financial audits. These duties may also be assumed by a non-paid director or paid staff member as the board determines. However, it is the duty of ***all*** district board members to exercise fiscal oversight for their district, whether the district has a manager or other staff in place.

Directors who do not serve the board as officers, have the responsibility of participating in the development of plans, gathering information and making recommendations to the board, assuming duties and carrying out tasks as assigned, and participating in all board meetings. Many directors also serve on board committees. Some examples of common board committees include education, budget, fundraising, legislation/advocacy, and public relations. The board develops committees based on specific needs of the district.

Associate directors are also a vital part of a district board. The position of associate director was created to allow the public an opportunity to take an active role in the operation of a district without

being a voting member of the board. Often associate directors become directors after serving the district as an associate. Associate directors can assist districts with special projects or activities and serve in an advisory capacity to the board.

Meetings

Section 9308 of Division 9 states that directors shall hold regular monthly RCD meetings at a usual location and time within the district. Meetings are an essential part of RCD operations. They allow directors to make decisions about district direction and give the public a chance to comment on district activities. The following requirements and suggestions help RCDs stay in compliance with applicable laws and get the most out of their meetings.

Quorum

A quorum is the minimum number of directors who must be present for formal actions of the board to be valid. A majority of the directors constitutes a quorum. For example, if the board has five members, three must be present at the meeting. This rule applies even if the district has vacancies. For instance, even if a five-member board has two vacancies, the RCD must still have three directors present in order to pass formal motions. In the case of a seven member board, if only four members are present, they must unanimously vote on a motion to take action. The exception to the requirement of a quorum is that a number less than a quorum may adjourn a meeting.

The Ralph M. Brown Act

“All meetings of the legislative body of a local agency shall be open and public, and all persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting of the legislative body of a local agency.” (Government Code 54953) As public agencies, RCDs must comply with the provisions of Government Code 54950 et seq, commonly known as the Brown Act or the Public Meeting Act. The Brown Act was passed in 1953 to ensure that local agencies conducted their business in public. The act establishes the rule that all meetings of a legislative body of a local agency should be open to the public, subject to specific exceptions.

Meetings

The Brown Act has undergone several revisions since it was first adopted. In the 1994 revision, the Brown Act was changed to officially define the term meeting. Section 54952.2 (a) states that a “meeting includes any congregation of a majority of the members of a legislative body at the same time and place to hear, discuss, or deliberate upon any item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body or the local agency to which it pertains.” In other words, a meeting is a gathering of a majority of board members to discuss district business. For example, if three directors of a five-member board got together for coffee just before the regular board meeting and discussed district business in the process, they would be in violation of the Brown Act. Collective briefings of any form must be open to the public and comply with the Brown Act agenda requirements.

Exceptions

The act does provide a few exceptions that allow directors to meet in the same place and time as long as they avoid discussing district business. Directors are permitted to attend conferences together as long as they avoid discussing RCD business. A majority of the board members can also attend community meetings of meetings of another legislative body if they avoid discussing district business. They are allowed to discuss district business at such meetings if it is on the agenda posted by the other legislative body. However, the meeting must be open to the public and comply with all Brown Act requirements. A majority of directors are also allowed to attend purely social or ceremonial events such as a wedding or graduation ceremony. It's important to remember that in all the exceptions, the board must avoid discussing district business unless it is part of an agenda that complies with all Brown Act requirements.

Serial Meetings

Directors also need to be careful to avoid having a “serial meeting”. Serial meetings occur when a collective concurrence is developed without having a formal meeting. A serial meeting can take the “daisy chain” form. A daisy chain meeting could be initiated when director A talks to director B about district business, then director B talks to director C about the same topic and so on until a majority of board members have discussed the topic. In such a case, if the majority of the members have talked about the topic and a collective concurrence has been established, a serial meeting has taken place. Serial meetings can also take the “hub and spoke”

format. For example, Robert, an employee of Cindy Creek RCD, called the RCD president to discuss RCD business. Robert then called the vice president to discuss the same topic and told the vice president what the president thought. Robert continued to call directors until he had reached a majority. In this case the board had indirectly discussed a topic without public notice and was therefore in violation of the Brown Act. Such serial meetings can also take place using email, fax, or any other method of communication.

Agendas

The Brown Act requires boards to post meeting agendas at least 72 hours before the meeting in a location freely accessible to the public. RCDs are required by Section 9308 of Division 9 to select a day, time, and place for their regular meetings. The day, time, or location can be changed only after the district passes a resolution and publishes a notice of the change in a newspaper of general circulation.

Agendas must include a brief general description of all business to be discussed or acted upon at the meeting. The agenda must also include a description of any items to be discussed in a closed session. Descriptions on agendas must include enough information to give members of the public a good idea what will be discussed at the meeting. The 1994 revision further defined the meaning of a brief description saying that agenda items generally need not be more than 20 words. Agendas also must include a designated time for public comment on each agenda.

With three exceptions, no action or discussion can take place on an item not posted on the agenda. However, board members are permitted to answer questions from the public so long as no action is either taken or promised.

The three exceptions to the posting rule specified in Government Code 54954.2(b) include: emergency situations, the need for an immediate action, or an item from a previous agenda. An emergency situation exists in the following cases: 1) public health or safety is threatened; 2) a failure to act will result in a work stoppage; or 3) there is a severe disaster. This would generally apply to RCDs only in rare circumstances. An example may be if there is a severe flood that results in widespread damage. Another example may be if NRCS offers to help stabilize riverbanks but they request that the district act as a local sponsor. If a director brings up the topic at the board meeting for a vote, he or she would not be in violation of the Brown Act.

The need for immediate action exception occurs when the failure to act immediately will result in a lost opportunity. For example, if a director finds a promising grant opportunity the day of the meeting but the application is due in two days, the director could bring it up at the board meeting for a vote and not be in violation of the act.

The item from a previous agenda exception is rarely used. This exception can only be used if an item appeared on a previous agenda and was continued from a meeting that occurred not more than five days earlier.

Closed Sessions

Without specific authority in the Brown Act for a closed session the topic must be discussed in public. If the district decides to hold a closed session it must post an agenda that identifies the reason for the session and briefly what will be discussed. The agenda must cite the section of the Brown Act that allows for the closed session. Section 54954.5 of the act contains examples of how to present reasons for a closed session on an agenda.

After the closed session, the board must open the meeting to the public and disclose what was discussed and what actions resulted. It is important to remember that meetings are either open or closed. The RCD can't invite only certain members of the public and exclude others. Closed sessions should only include RCD directors plus any additional support staff or attorneys needed for the discussion.

Closed sessions are allowed for some personnel matters. However, discussions of salary increases are **not** a valid reason to have a closed session. Pay raises must be discussed in public. The board can hold closed sessions for the following personnel matters:

1. Appointment or employment of staff.
2. Employee performance evaluations.
3. Employee discipline, dismissals, or complaints against an employee. However, if the board chooses to hold a closed session for any of these reasons, they must notify the employee in writing at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting. The employee has the right to have the

matter discussed in public but need not exercise their right to do so.

Pending litigation can also be discussed in a closed session. Boards can confer with their attorney in a closed session regarding formally initiated litigation or anticipated litigation.

Closed sessions are also permitted for real estate negotiations. Real estate negotiations can include the purchase, sale, or lease of property. Prior to closed session negotiations, the RCD must identify its negotiator, the property discussed in negotiation, the negotiating parties, and what is being negotiated (price, terms of payment, etc.).

Some aspects of labor negotiation can also occur in a closed session. However, it is important to note that closed session labor negotiations must occur between the district and an employee organization. At this time, there is no labor organization in California that represents RCD employees.

As mentioned earlier, all government codes are subject to change. RCD directors have a responsibility to study and be aware of code changes that affect district operations. It is extremely important that directors ensure that the district complies with laws such as the Brown Act. For more information on the Brown Act visit the CARCD website at <http://www.carcd.org> to view Brown Act power point training.

Policies

Policies are a useful tool to help directors manage district operations. The following is a brief discussion about personnel policies. As mentioned previously, districts can develop many types of policies based on their specific needs. For more detailed information about policies, please consult Volume 1, Step 8 of the RCD Guidebook.

Personnel

The first step to creating a personnel policy or for that matter, any policy, is to review policies created by other agencies or organizations. Places to look include: the RCD Guidebook, other RCDs, CARCD, the county, legal firms, or any other agency or organization the RCD has contact with. The NACD has developed a Personnel Management Reference Book to help RCDs develop personnel policies. A district should exercise judgment in making sure their policies are applicable to California laws and regulations. Personnel policies will help the RCD avoid many problems. The following list identifies items that are typically found in a personnel policy.

Employment

- ❖ Definition of employment classes (full, part-time, temporary)
- ❖ Length of any probationary period
- ❖ Statement of nondiscrimination
- ❖ Qualification requirements for employees
- ❖ Who has the authority to hire, set salaries, and conduct reviews

- ❖ Who acts as employee's supervisor (it is typically district manager for employees, and the board or president for executive or managerial position)
- ❖ Job descriptions
- ❖ Termination and its effect on benefits
- ❖ Statement regarding employment of relatives and conflict of interests

Compensation

- ❖ Working hours, overtime, paydays, paid holidays
- ❖ Methods of salary progression
- ❖ Listing and general explanation of benefits, including who is eligible to receive them

Employer/Employee Relations

- ❖ Grievance procedures
- ❖ Administration of discipline
- ❖ Code of conduct

Performance Evaluation

- ❖ How employees are evaluated and by whom

Employee Training

- ❖ Orientation of new employees
- ❖ How training needs are determined
- ❖ Training plans

Employee Services

- ❖ Safety on the job, including procedures for reporting accidents and seeking medical

attention (if the district does not have a separate safety policy)

- ❖ Awards program and other recognition, if any, for significant contributions of employees

Once a personnel policy has been developed, directors should ensure that personnel management is conducted according to policy. Furthermore, directors must clearly explain the policy to all employees and ensure that the policy is understood. It is also important to conduct annual performance reviews of all employees. Such reviews and policies should be signed by the employee as having read and understood.

Insurance

Does your district provide advice, employ personnel or manage projects? If so, you need insurance. However, even if your district is not doing any of the activities mentioned, it is still absolutely critical that your district have insurance. In today's litigious environment, no organization is safe from being a defendant in a lawsuit. It is irrelevant that your district is providing a public service or benefiting the community. One lawsuit could potentially end your program.



It is imperative that your district consult an insurance company to determine what types and levels of coverage are appropriate for your organization. CARCD or the

California Special Districts Association (CSDA) can also provide assistance on obtaining insurance. Many RCDs have already dealt with this issue and may be able to provide assistance. Many funding

agencies require districts to have insurance and to keep it in force throughout the term of grant contracts. Insurance requirements may include:

- Worker's Compensation Insurance in accordance with the statutory requirement of the State of California,
- Commercial general liability insurance,
- Automobile and/or property liability insurance,
- Errors and Omissions insurance for directors.

This list is not all-inclusive. Your district must consult with an insurance company and the funding agency to determine the types and amounts of coverage that are required.

Although insurance is costly, not having insurance could be devastating. Your district cannot afford not to have insurance.

Personnel and Volunteers

RCDs often have extensive programs that require employing full time staff. Districts can hire both employees and contractors depending on their needs. Contractors are generally used for one-time projects that require special skills. Employees, on the other hand, are more of a long-term investment and are directly supervised by the district. Employees generally work in the district office and use district equipment or property. There are advantages and disadvantages to both options.

Employees can be a great investment for the RCD. They can learn and develop skills that will be an asset to the district in the future.

Contractors are generally hired to complete one specific job. For example, if the RCD would like to complete a stream bank restoration project, hiring a hydrologist as a contractor may be appropriate. For the most part, the contractor will only work on the specific project they have been contracted for. The district must be careful not to treat contractors too much like an employee. Here are some tips to remember when hiring contractors:

- Don't exercise too much control over the contractor.
- In most cases, the contractor should not work out of the district office but maintain his or her own office and equipment.
- The district should not be the contractors' sole source of income. Ideally, the contractor would have other clients.

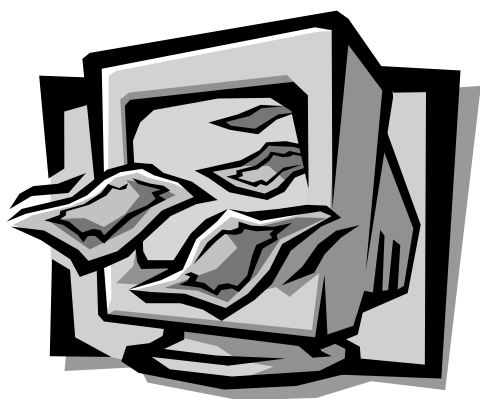
Once the district has assessed its needs and decided to hire employees or contractors the next step is developing a personnel policy. The policy should identify one director, generally the board president, as the staff supervisor. The district can also delegate staff supervision to the district manager or executive director; however, the director assigned to staff relations should work closely with the managing employee. The district is ultimately responsible for employee supervision and must avoid delegating the responsibility to NRCS or any other outside agency.

It's important to designate one director as the primary contact between the board and employees. It can be extremely difficult for employees to have

more than one person telling them what to do. This is especially true if directors are offering them conflicting input. To avoid this, the designated director should be the only board member who works directly with the staff.

Volunteers can also be a valuable asset for the district. RCDs typically use volunteers to help with specific projects. For example, if the RCD wanted to clean up a river they might recruit volunteers to participate in a stream bank “clean up day”. RCDs can also start volunteer monitoring programs, use volunteers for educational events, direct mailings, data entry, creating brochures, or mapping noxious weeds. There are many different ways RCDs can use volunteers. However, if a district chooses to use volunteers it is best to develop a volunteer policy to assist with the management of the volunteers. A volunteer policy should contain guidelines for work and training, guidelines for safe work practices, and grounds for recruitment. As with employees, volunteers should be informed of all district policies and sign a statement once they have reviewed the policies.

DISTRICT FINANCES



Budgeting

The importance of having a budget cannot be understated. In fact, it is absolutely critical an RCD's success because it is the financial foundation on which monetary decisions are made. Most districts have limited resources. The budget is a formal process of making decisions and allocating resources, so that a district's strategic plan can be implemented.

*As a director, it is critical that **you** participate in the budgeting process.* The budget provides you with information and also serves as a record of decisions that have already been made. There are numerous ways in which a budget can be developed. The type of budget used by your district will depend on many variables including staffing, financial resources, individual personalities, and the risks inherent within your district.

Budgets include both revenues and expenditures. Your district must identify its funds and then decide how to spend those resources to achieve its goals. It is important to anticipate unexpected costs. Therefore, a financial cushion and even a reserve should be built into the budget. The budget should also include: costs associated with specific projects; daily operating expenses for staffing, overhead, insurance, utilities, etc.; and equipment purchase, maintenance, and depreciation. The budget provides you with a tool that can be used to compare estimated revenues and expenditures with actual monies received and spent at year's end.

The budget is a working document. The district must determine a fiscal year, such as January 1st,

and use that as the starting point for the year. However, the board should revisit the budget throughout the year, modifying it as necessary. Unlike many organizations, most RCDs cannot rely on a steady stream of revenues but are funded on a sporadic and inconsistent basis. Therefore, the budget must be revised as revenues are received. It is critical that the board actively manage the district budget to ensure financial solvency. It is also a good idea to have contingency plans. If the budget does not function as developed, the district should be prepared with other alternatives and ideas.

Budgets are financial road maps. Without a map, when traveling, you would be lost. Budgets provide a sense of direction and are a necessary tool available to assist directors in fulfilling their duties. Therefore, because of its importance, *it is recommended that you or your district purchase a book and/or take training about the budgeting process.*

Funding

No organization can operate without funding. Getting money to implement your district's annual and strategic plan is a huge challenge. It is not easy, but absolutely necessary.

Each district is unique and serves different constituents. It is important for your district to identify the critical issues in your area and establish a list of priorities. This list will be used to develop the strategic plan. As a director, you have a responsibility to participate in this process. Once the strategic plan has been developed, an annual plan must be created. In fact, this is one of the district's

duties identified in Division 9 in order to receive certain types of funding. Having a plan is great but without money, the plan will never be implemented. Therefore, it is imperative that funding be obtained. Fortunately, there are numerous ways that a district can get funds. This takes creativity, persistence, hard work, dedication and the recognition that it is not only an ongoing activity but also, never-ending. The following list identifies common sources of funding that districts may use to fund their organization.

Property Tax Assessments:

Tax assessments are a vital source of funds for some districts, however the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 significantly curtailed a district's ability to derive revenues from new property tax assessments. New assessments require two-thirds voter approval within the district. Districts receiving property tax revenues prior to Proposition 13 generally continue to receive county collected property taxes that are proportionate to their pre-Proposition 13 share of the property taxes in the County.

Fundraising Projects:

Districts can engage in a broad range of fundraising activities and can be quite entrepreneurial in spirit. However, care should be taken to ensure fundraising activities remain ethical and do not create conflicts of interest among board directors or staff. Fundraising activities may include holding fundraising drives and appealing for donations, gifts, and project sponsorships; accepting funds from community and family foundations; special

events (tree sales, bake sales, golf tournaments, walk-a-thons, etc.); receiving fees for admission to a dinner honoring a guest; selling conservation-related items. The board ensures that the district holds fundraisers that can withstand ethical scrutiny. The publication, *Standards for Charitable Solicitations*, issued by the Council of Better Business Bureaus, provides detailed information on ethics and fundraising.

Fees for Services:

According to section 9403.5 of Division 9, districts are authorized to charge and receive fees for services. Fees may not exceed the cost reasonably borne by a district in providing the service. Fees can include the costs of staff time, overhead, benefits, travel, postage, and materials necessary to perform the service. The district must ensure that they do not compete with local businesses. Some of the services that may be appropriate for charging fees include the rental of conservation equipment, erosion control planning and evaluation, review of environmental impact reports for local governments, conservation education, workshops, tours, and fees for district newsletter advertising. In certain situations, districts may find that the sense of value placed on a service by customers is enhanced when there is a fee associated with it. In other situations fees may discourage the demand for district services, particularly if a potential customer has the option of receiving the same service elsewhere at a lower cost. The decision to charge fees for services ultimately must be made by the district board, based upon the specific circumstances of the district. However, it is important to recognize that districts may be liable

for legal claims if the services are not performed properly or property is damaged. Legal advice and appropriate insurance are vital parts of a service program.

Grants:

Grant funding is available from numerous sources including governmental agencies, businesses, foundations, individuals, and local organizations. It is important to recognize that each grantor has specific goals and objectives when providing funds. Before submitting any proposal, research or contact the funding agency to determine if your district is eligible for a grant. Each grantor has specific requirements and unique forms. It is absolutely critical that the district meet all the requirements necessary to submit a proposal. Some grantors will only grant to 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations. If you determine you would like to apply for such a grant, contact CARCD or your regional Resource Conservation and Development Council for their assistance.

Federal: The federal government offers a wide variety of grants and loans, many of which a district is eligible to receive. Numerous agencies provide funding including the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Land Reclamation, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Interior, Department of Transportation, and many more. Don't hesitate to ask agency representatives if they know of other federal programs for which your district may be eligible.

State: California agencies provide millions of dollars in grants and loans. Districts are eligible to submit proposals for grant funding to numerous departments including the Department of Conservation, Fish and Game, Forestry, Parks and Recreation, Education, CALTRANS, and many more. It is critical for districts to recognize that funding becomes available throughout the year. Therefore, your district must be persistent and constantly looking for opportunities. Networking with other districts, board members, and employees and sharing funding ideas often makes the difference between a successful district and one that is not as successful.

Local: Many districts do not maximize the use of local resources, but rely more often on federal and state programs. However, local grants and loans should not be overlooked. It is important for the district to develop a working relationship with their community. If the community recognizes the district's importance, the potential for funding rises dramatically. Local government may be inclined to use the district for meeting a need. Furthermore, many local non-profit or community organizations want to support a locally based group. Often competition for local resources is not as competitive as on the state or federal level. In many cases, it is based on developing a relationship and meeting a need. Your district is well positioned to tap this potential source of funding. Several districts receive funding from their County Board of Supervisors. Some have fee for service agreements with local governments and school districts. No opportunity should be overlooked.

Corporations or Local Businesses: Many companies provide funds for programs that benefit the community and promote their company. Districts can use this to their advantage. The possibilities are endless. For example, a company may assist in sponsoring an education program. Local businesses may offer a district discounts on products or services, such as seeds, tools, signage, wood, or even the printing of the district newsletter. However, it is important to remember that the district must maintain its autonomy, especially since the RCD is a governmental entity.

Foundations: Numerous foundations provide funding to a variety of organizations including RCDs. Often their scope is very limited and they focus on specific issues. Typically foundation grants require less paperwork than do government grants and there may be less competition for these funds in certain regional areas.

When relying on grants, it is important to remember that funding is usually for a specific purpose and normally available only for a limited period of time. Therefore, it is critical for your district to develop a plan that replaces this source of funding to ensure that the districts programs and projects continue, uninterrupted.

There are thousands of grants available and it is impossible for your district to apply for all of them. Therefore, it is critical that your organization develop a list based on your district's priorities. The board should discuss the potential funding opportunities and collectively decide which ones to pursue. This process ensures that all directors

provide input and that the district's decision supports the strategic plan.

Normally, grants are awarded on a competitive basis. Applicants submit a proposal that is ranked and placed on a list. Grants are awarded to those organizations that have the highest scores. As a director, you are responsible for ensuring that the proposal submitted by your district is professionally done and meets all the necessary requirements. Although the following checklist is not comprehensive, it provides guidance on some areas you may want to review prior to submitting a proposal.

- ☐ Does the proposal meet all mandatory requirements?
- ☐ Is the proposal signed by the appropriate individual?
- ☐ Are support documents attached?
- ☐ Does the budget provide sufficient detail and do the numbers add up correctly?
- ☐ Is the match requirement fulfilled, if required?
- ☐ Are partners identified and their role explained?
- ☐ Is the proposal neat and legible?
- ☐ Will it be submitted on time?
- ☐ Does the proposal clearly describe a problem or need? How does the proposal plan to solve the problem?
- ☐ If you were the grantor, would you fund this proposal?

Increasingly, funding organizations are looking for proposals that involve partners and demonstrate cooperation between local, state, and federal agencies as well as private and public entities. Therefore, your district should always involve other organizations in the project, particularly from the local community. Finally, it is becoming more common for grantors to require matching funds. Therefore, it is important to ensure that proposals are developed with multiple funding sources in mind. The more matching funds and partners that are incorporated into a proposal, the better the opportunity for funding becomes. Finally, it is essential to remember that it is a very competitive process. There are limited grant dollars and many applicants. Not every application can be selected for funding. Each proposal your district submits is another opportunity for funding and fine-tuning its grant application skills. If your district submits well-written and complete applications that involve partners, it is only a matter of time before your district receives money. **Don't Give Up!**

Districts have numerous funding sources available. In addition to those listed above, the Internet, CARCD, and various listserves are great resources to use to find potential funding sources. As a director, it is your responsibility to assist the district in locating and deciding the best funding source to use to implement the district's strategic plan. Each funding source has advantages and disadvantages. The best approach uses multiple funding sources and does not rely on one exclusively. As a director, you help establish the district's direction. It is crucial that you participate in prioritizing your district's programs and activities and grant opportunities.

Auditing

Section 26909 of the Government Code requires an annual audit of every special purpose district by the county auditor or a contracted CPA. For specific guidance and/or exceptions see the above section of the Government Code.



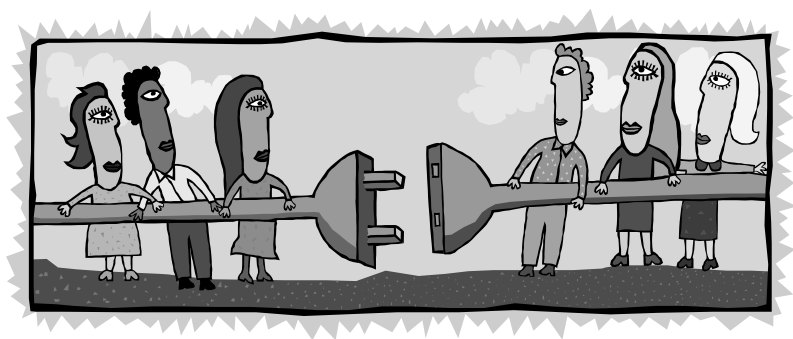
As the preceding paragraph describes, audits are required by law. However, audits also provide an organization with a higher level of assurance. Special districts are not immune from fraud, theft, and

mismanagement. **Remember as directors, you have the ultimate fiscal responsibility for your district's financial management.** Audits will not deter or prevent all crime or mismanagement but they can minimize the risk. Furthermore, audits provide both the public and other government agencies with confidence in your organization. Audits establish public accountability and provide an independent review of your district that other non-governmental organizations need not provide to the public. Auditors can identify weaknesses in management controls and offer advice on improving and streamlining operations. For example, an audit may suggest that your organization adhere to the fundamental requirement that the same individual is not responsible for every facet of financial transactions. This simple control, separation of duties, may prevent your district from being a victim of gross negligence or fraud.

It is important for you to ensure that your district complies with the Government Code and that steps

have been taken to protect not only district resources but also the district's reputation throughout the community.

PARTNERSHIPS



Partnering with other agencies, tribal governments, individuals, and private entities is taking on an ever more important role to the success of RCDs. Budget constraints and limited staffing resources affect the ability of many agencies to fully implement their programs. Partnering is a way affected agencies can meet their program obligations given these limitations; therefore they are much more amenable to entering into partnering agreements than in the past.

In addition, many RCDs rely on state and federal grant monies to help fund their staffing and administration needs. During the selection process, grant review panels often are required to give higher scores to applicants who can demonstrate they are partnering with other agencies or groups.

Government grants commonly require matching funds (cash and in-kind) to qualify. Partnering is an effective way of meeting the match requirements of many government grants. For example, one district successfully met its in-kind match requirement by partnering with a local Boy Scout troop to conduct GIS mapping of invasive plant species. Be creative and consider all types of partnerships.

Relationship of RCDs and NRCS

The relationship between RCDs and the US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), formerly known as the Soil Conservation Service, has been long standing. The NRCS was originally formed in 1937 to address the crisis of the Dust Bowl. Individual state legislation establishing local conservation districts was created shortly thereafter. Since then, NRCS and RCDs have had a close working

relationship, with NRCS appointing a local district conservationist to provide technical assistance to districts, as well as acting as a liaison between the district and federal programs. Local NRCS offices also frequently employ other specialists, such as soil conservationists and engineers, to provide technical assistance to the district.

RCDs and NRCS formally ratified their relationship through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed more than fifty years ago to establish a partnership and mutual roles between districts and the USDA. The MOU is reviewed by all partners annually. In 1994 the MOU was revised to modernize and reinvent the historic partnership, and to add state conservation agencies to the agreement. A number of other recent agreements were made to supplement the MOU and further define the roles of the partners. Additional information can be found on these agreements by referring to the introduction to the RCD Guidebook contained on the CD included with this handbook.

Often the close proximity and association of NRCS and RCDs confuses the public. Don't forget that RCDs and NRCS should each maintain separate identities so that the public is not confused about what the districts can do and how they are funded. Districts are **not** federal agencies, nor have they ever been.

Other Partnerships

Two not-for-profit associations that assist RCDs are the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) and the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).

CARCD is an advocate for natural resources and conservation public policy issues; coordinates and supports RCD activity; and provides information, education and training programs to its members. NACD develops and advocates national conservation and natural resources policies at the federal level. It also provides technical services and information to member districts.

The Department of Conservation has a somewhat unique relationship with RCDs. Division 9 originally set up oversight of resource conservation in the state through a state Resource Conservation Commission. This commission was dismantled during the late 1970's when it was no longer funded by the Governor's budget, and some of its oversight responsibility fell to the department. While the department does not have regulatory oversight of RCDs, it serves districts through offering training on Division 9 and related government codes, providing permit and environmental review assistance, and by providing financial assistance through its Watershed Coordinator grant program.

RCDs in California as a whole have no formal relationship with most other federal, state, and private entities, though Division 9 encourages individual districts to form partnerships with any entities it might need to. Typically, agencies such as the US Environmental Protection Agency at the federal level, or California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection at the state level, willingly enter into agreements with individual districts to collaborate on projects. Districts typically enter into contracts (grant contracts or cost share agreements) to accomplish work both partners in the agreement see as mutually beneficial to resources in the

district. Currently the United States Forest Service and districts are negotiating California agreements.

Many districts also form working partnerships with agencies within their districts. For example, several districts work with the US Bureau of Land Management on conservation projects. The University of California Cooperative Extension is another common partner. In some counties, districts share office space with private organizations such as the Farm Bureau. Each district must determine how to actively cultivate partnerships that can assist the district in reaching its conservation goals.

Notes:

PLANNING



While many districts perform traditional RCD roles such as conservation education or soil erosion reduction, they are often not connected to a greater network where conservation is pursued as a means to improve quality of life for all individuals within the district. For example, the issue of non-point source water pollution is pervasive, the public has become aware of the causes, and there is a popular desire to address the problems and prevent pollution of this type. This is an example of an area where districts may wish to seek greater involvement.

Although well situated within local communities, many districts have not fully mobilized to address conservation and environmental concerns. Numerous local organizations devoted to environmental concerns have been created in recent years while the existence of a local conservation district may have gone unrecognized. Despite extreme variation among districts, as a whole, they have not capitalized on the growing public interest in environmental quality. To preserve their role, districts need to aggressively redefine, promote, and market themselves as vital units of government for locally led conservation on local issues and problems.

The need to effectively mobilize districts becomes more apparent when trends of cooperating agency funding and personnel are examined. In recent years, both the Extension Service and NRCS have faced reductions in funding, and support staff for districts is on the decline.

This serves as indicators that districts must engage in a strategic planning process that will address new concerns, including those that may be raised by

stakeholders during the process. Outcomes that could be realized through a strategic planning process include:

- A Mission and Vision for districts that is shared by directors and stakeholders.
- Goals and strategies that will enable districts to realize their mission and vision, thus improving natural resources conservation in the community.
- Development and implementation of programs and activities that will enable districts to accomplish their goals and strategies.
- An organizational assessment that will enable districts to build on their strengths and deal with issues of funding, personnel, training, public relations/marketing, and relationships with other entities and individuals.
- Development of an accountability plan that will provide the means for evaluating programs and activities so program impacts can be demonstrated.
- Productive relationships with cooperating agencies, other conservation organizations and agencies, and other groups with similar interests and goals that will result in improved natural resources conservation for the entire community.

Beyond these practical reasons for planning strategically in your district, long-range planning is

one of the provisions outlined in Division 9 for the administration of a resource conservation district. The authors of Division 9 have specifically stated that long- and short-range plans will be an integral part of district functioning: districts wishing to take advantage of state grant programs through the Department of Conservation are only able to do so if they create long- and short-range plans.

The following four-step process is one approach to planning that incorporates many of the concepts of applied strategic planning. Other planning approaches may be more appropriate for individual RCDs, given their level of resources, staffing, sophistication, and activities. Additional information on planning can be found by referring to Volume 1, Step 3 of the RCD Guidebook contained on the CD included with this handbook.

Step 1: Developing a Long-Range Plan

The board of directors establishes a planning committee (the planners). The committee includes a variety of persons with diverse interests. In addition to directors, the committee may include associate directors, staff, representation from the NRCS, other federal agencies, state agencies, city, county and tribal government, and the community at large. Such input is valuable to the RCD in optimizing its use of existing and anticipated funding sources and staff support.

When planning, each planner envisions a future for the district, given the community's needs. To do this, the planners determine the mission of the district. This may have already been done by individual districts but should be revised from time

to time. Its basic role in the community serves as a guide for planning the district's future direction. Cooperating organizations may also provide other insights for planning. The planners also assess the district's skills and resources that may influence the district's ability to meet the defined community needs. This assessment includes staff resources, financial resources, time, supplies, equipment, and expertise.

After developing a mission, each planner envisions the future of the district. Again, this may have already been done but should be revisited from time to time. Each imagines a future, commonly five to ten years from the present. A method useful in producing a vision of the future is to imagine a reporter writing an article on a very successful district. What does s/he see? What types of services does the district provide? How does it fund its services? What types of conservation programs does it sponsor? Some examples of visions are: Adopt-a-Watershed programs put in place in the schools within the district; active Coordinated Resource Management Programs (CRMPs) in all targeted watersheds within the district; providing non-point source pollution education to local communities and municipalities; and employment of a full-time district manager and other positions.

Envisioning a future naturally leads to the recognition of issues that are key to the success of the district (e.g., increasing soil erosion services to landowners). The planners draw district *objectives* from these key issues. Whereas key issues generally are not quantifiable, objectives specify details (e.g., increase the percentage of landowners participating in soil erosion programs from 10 percent to 25

percent). Each objective should adequately describe whom or what the objective is directed toward, the estimated date of attainment of the objective, and a concrete measure of progress (e.g., a measurable objective might be a 15 percent increase in child participation in an educational program by the end of the district's current fiscal year). A measurable objective allows the planners to compare the results of a program or activity to its original intent.

After determining district objectives, the planners formulate the optimal method of attaining them. This can be described as paving a *path* to the vision. For instance, to meet an objective of reducing water pollution in a lagoon, the board could enact a clean-up and monitoring program funded by a specific state grant or partnership project. Considering each objective separately, the planners brainstorm several alternative paths that would plausibly meet the objective of concern. The goal is to merely write down whatever tactic comes to mind without evaluating it. Once several alternatives are available, the planners evaluate each.

The selection of the best path leads to the discovery of district *activities*. The planners ensure the description of each activity: indicates when the activity will commence and end; assigns responsibility to a person for ensuring satisfactory completion of the activity; allocates work resources to the tasks detailed; establishes realistic goals; and ideally provides alternative plans should situations change. Also, the planners ensure each activity foreseeable produces results and elicits the commitment of the workers. Some milestones should be attainable in the near term to encourage a sense of progress and achievement, while other

mid-term and long-term milestones should also be apparent.

Once the objectives and activities have been determined, it is often necessary to prioritize the activities based on available resources. Once this is done, the planners record this information in a logical and organized *long-range plan*. The long-range plan provides for orderly implementation and reduces the chances for confusion. The long-range plan should provide sufficient information and instructions for the district to perform the activities that can and will meet the stated objectives.

Step 2: Developing an Annual Plan

To make the implementation of the long-range plan more manageable, the planners divide long-range objectives and activities into more workable annual portions. They then implement the resulting *annual plans*. For example, suppose the district will take five years to reach its vision. The planners divide these five years of work into five logical divisions, each of which will take one year to complete. The board then pursues higher priority objective first. To prioritize the long-range objectives, the planners compare each objective's cost-to-benefit ratio, overall resources available, and the absolute benefit a community might receive. To achieve an objective, the district must expend a certain amount of money and other operating resources (the cost). In return, it promotes conservation (the benefit). An objective with a lower ratio has higher priority than one with a higher ratio, but this does not preclude a district from prioritizing a project that they are firmly committed to as a public benefit, for example creating educational brochures or manuals on

various topics without a specific dollar amount return. The cost/benefit ratio for such a project may be seen as an unquantifiable marketing or public relations tool, as well as a catalyst to encourage voluntary conservation practices.

Step 3: Annual Plan Implementation

Once the annual plan has been prepared, the district should begin to implement it. The essential ingredient in implementing the annual plan is management. The board of directors ensures the participants are capable of performing the activities and services delineated by the annual plan. The board monitors their work and ensures that they successfully implement short-term activities, with a view to longer-term implementation as well. It is important to devise methods of correcting shortcomings, such as holding formal progress reviews and setting intermediate work goals or milestones. The board also monitors and evaluates the district's progress toward its objectives. If district activities begin to depart from the plan, the board adjusts them. Or perhaps the plan itself needs to be reevaluated. If the board anticipates changes in the plan; it detects problems before they escalate and it provides solutions that get the district back on track.

Step 4: Annual Report

To evaluate the progress the district has made toward solving conservation problems, the planners must generate an annual status report. The report summarizes the accomplishments of the district and the work directors, staff, and volunteers have contributed during the year. The report also

recognizes activities and projects identified in the annual work plan that may not have been completed and that require further effort. As a consequence of generating measurable objectives with specific deadlines for completion, the planners can compare the annual objectives listed in the annual work plan with the actual results presented in the annual report. They pay attention to any shortcomings and attempt to understand the causes behind them, including revising the objectives with more reachable goals if necessary. This understanding forms the basis of long-range plan revisions.

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